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GOVT WORKING HARD TO TIDE OVER CRISIS, SAYS LANKAN PM

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on Monday said his government is working round-the-clock to address the crisis

END PROTESTS, RAJAPAKSA APPEALS TO PEOPLE

Amid growing pressure on him to quit, the embattled leader addressed the nation on Monday in a bid to calm the agitating people who are protesting on the streets over lengthy power outages and shortage of gas, food and other essentials. Mahinda, the elder brother of Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, appealed to them to end their agitation

BID TO FORM ALL-PARTY INTERIM GOVT FAILS

- Meanwhile, efforts to establish an all-party interim government remained inconclusive as the talks between President Gotabaya and the group of independents from his own ruling SLPP coalition failed to make progress on the issue. Gotabaya had on Sunday invited the 11-party coalition allies for a discussion | P11

April 19

NO-TRUST MOTIONS LIKELY TO BE TAKEN UP WHEN PARLIAMENT CONVENES NEXT WEEK

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Direct talks the only way to end Ukraine war: PM

Biden says India and the US will continue consultation on managing conflict fallout

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE ongoing crisis in Ukraine can be resolved only through direct talks between the presidents of Russia and Ukraine, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told US President Joe Biden on Monday during a virtual conference ahead of the India-US 2+2 dialogue in Washington.

"The situation is very worrying. Sometime back we had thousands of Indians stranded in Ukraine and we had to work hard in getting them evacuated. It is unfortunate that one student died. I called Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Voldoymyr Zelenskyy many times, urging them to end this conflict, even suggested a one-on-one dialogue," said Modi.

India has sent a lot of relief supplies as humanitarian aid to Ukraine and is preparing another consignment of essentials including medicines to Ukraine soon.

The PM also expressed his anguish over the Bucha massacre and said innocents had died and India had urged for an independent probe.

For his part, Biden said both sides will "continue our close consultation on how to manage the destabilizing effects of this Russian war". Lauding India for sending humanitarian aid to Ukraine, Biden said he was looking forward to meeting Modi in person in Japan during the May 24 Quad meeting.

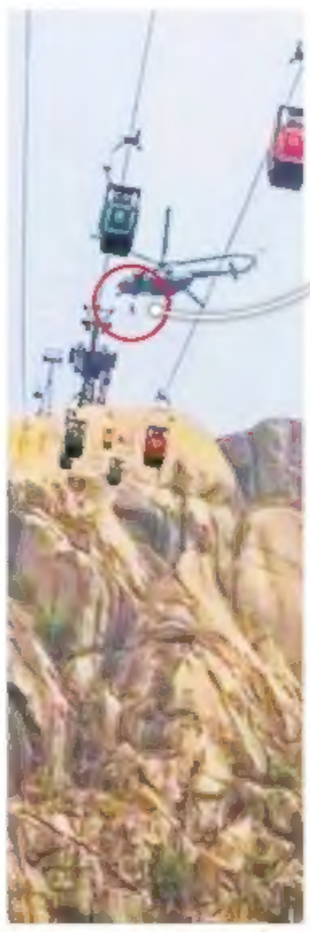
Other than the Ukraine situation, the two leaders had an extensive exchange of views on several regional and global issues such as the pandemic, global economic recovery, climate action, recent developments in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region, a PMO statement said.

Modi thanked Biden for facilitating the virtual meeting as it would give direction to the 2+2 ministerial meeting, which will be led by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on the Indian side and their US counterparts, Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony J Blinken.

"We (India and the US) are amongst the largest and oldest democracies and are natural partners," Modi said

No US flat on Russian oil

The US has not asked India to do anything in particular on the issue of oil import from Russia, the White House said on Monday, underling that New Delhi will make its own decisions on its energy needs



Rescue operation underway at the Trikut Ropeway on Monday | PTI

A 48-year-old man falls after his safety belt gave way while being pulled up from the trolley to the rescue helicopter. He loses his grip and falls some 150 feet to the valley

2 DIE IN J'KHAND ROPEWAY MISHAP

MUKESH RANJAN @ Ranchi

THE toll in the ropeway accident in Jharkhand's Deoghar district rose to two on Monday while 13 were still stuck mid-air when rescue operations were suspended at night.

A woman who was rescued on Sunday succumbed to her injuries on Monday morning while a man died on Monday evening after falling into the valley while being rescued. Officials said his safety belt broke when he was being airlifted to the helicopter.

The accident occurred when cable cars collided with each other due to a faulty ropeway system at Trikut Hills in Jharkhand's Deoghar, on Sunday evening, seriously injuring the tourists on board.

Two helicopters, Mi-17 and Mi-17 V5 of Indian Air Force, were deployed to rescue the stranded people. So far, 35 tourists were rescued by the NDRF, Indian Air Force, ITBP and state police. Thirteen people are still waiting to be rescued in two cable cars, officials said. Food packets, water and other relief materials were arranged for them by the district administration. Two state ministers and several government officials are camping at the site.

"We are taking help from the NDRF, Air Force and other experts to rescue the people who are stuck on the ropeway. Though the rescue operations could be started only in the morning, all efforts are being made on war footing to rescue the stranded people," said Chief Minister Hemant Soren.

According to officials, the collision took place due to a technical snag in the ropeway. State Disaster Management Minister Banna Gupta said a high-level probe will ordered and those responsible for the lapse will not be spared.

Meanwhile, the BJP termed the incident a result of inefficiency of the state government as the maintenance work of the ropeway was due for the past two years.

A girl who was injured in the accident being carried by security personnel | PTI

Will not tolerate violence, unlawful behaviour: Bommai

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Udupi

"THERE is nothing wrong in expressing views, but the government will not tolerate if people take law into their own hands or indulge in violence. This message has been sent out clearly," said Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai here on Monday.

Asked about a Hindu Task Force being formed in Mangaluru to combat 'Love Jihad', Bommai said there are laws to deal with everything. "Some of these laws were passed by the previous governments. We are not formulating any new rules," he added.

The government is taking a lot of timely decisions to ensure good governance. "I don't need any lessons from opposition parties. My actions speak for themselves and the allegation by opposition party leaders that I am silent on many issues has no truth," he said.

"The previous government was known for letting free individuals who were involved in murders. Where was the consciousness of the opposition party then," he asked.

Asked if he will ban outfits to which such individuals were affiliated, he said, "You will see it in the coming days."

He added that many Hindu youth were killed by such elements and the then government had not initiated any action. "Ours is a peaceful, progressive state. We know how to protect this state. We will show it through our deeds," he said.

ALLOW MINORITIES TO LIVE IN PEACE: BSY

With opposition Congress and Janata Dal (Secular) cornering the State Government over attacks on minorities, BJP leader and former chief minister B S Yediyurappa said people from minority communities should be allowed to live peacefully. "People from all religions should live peacefully in the state and Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai has already warned of taking action against miscreants involved in attacks on minorities," he told reporters on Monday.

ORE EXPORT

SC SEEKS RESPONSE OF STEEL MINISTRY

SC asked the Steel Ministry to apprise the court about its stand on pleas of mining firms seeking a nod to export their excavated iron ore | P9

Communal clashes mar Ram Navami events, 2 killed in Guj, Jharkhand

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Ahmedabad/Ranchi/Bhopal

TWO persons were killed and many others injured, including police personnel, as communal clashes marred Ram Navami processions in parts of the country, including Gujarat, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh on Sunday. While one person was murdered in Khambhat in Anand district of Gujarat, the other casualty was in Lohardaga in Jharkhand.

In Madhya Pradesh's Khargone town, local authorities on Monday started bulldozing 'illegal houses and properties' of those prima facie found involved in the violence that left at least 27 people injured. The injured include three senior police officers, including Superintendent of Police Siddharth Choudhary who received a bullet injury in his leg.

In Jharkhand, a grievously wounded person succumbed to his injuries, said Lohardaga Deputy Commissioner Waghmare Prasad Krishna, adding the victim hailed from Latihar. "To avoid any untoward incident, internet services have temporarily been blocked and Section 144 imposed," he said.

Sources in Latehar identified the deceased as Aman Ansari of Boda village. According to his family members, Aman was returning from Lohardaga along with his nephew Mohammed Wasim on Sunday evening when a mob attacked them at Kujra village leaving both critically injured. They were rushed to the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences in Ranchi, where Aman succumbed to his injuries while Wasim is fighting for survival.

Arson attack

At least 10 bikes, three carts, one tempo, four cycles and several shops were set on fire, following which, people from the other side set two houses ablaze near Bhokta Garden in Lohardaga

In Gujarat's Khambhat, incidents of stone throwing and arson were reported. In Himmatnagar in Sabarkhantha district, a 700-strong mob went on the rampage in Ashrafnagar town, Imamwada and Vanzara areas of the city. Complaints of damages to public property were filed against the attackers. P10

EXPRESS READ

School sees bomb threat mail 3 days late

Bengaluru: A reputed private school in Bengaluru noticed the bomb threat mail on Monday — three days after it was sent — after which they alerted the police, who thoroughly searched the premises and confirmed it as a hoax. The Cubbon Park police are now considering taking up a case of negligence against the Bishop Cotton Girls' School. P2

Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge at the ED office after being called for questioning in New Delhi on Monday | PTI

ED grills Kharge in Herald money laundering case

ENS @ New Delhi, Bengaluru

THE Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday examined Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha and senior Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge in connection with a money laundering case related to the National Herald newspaper.

Kharge, 79, was summoned to appear before the economic intelligence agency with regard to the high-profile probe. His statement was recorded under sections related to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) as the agency wants to understand some issues in the investigation, ED officials added.

It is said that Kharge's reply to most of the questions was: "I dont' know." The newspaper is owned and run by the Congress through a company named Associated Journals Ltd (AJL). P9

New PM Sharif chants the same old K-mantra

YESHI SELI @ new Delhi

BILATERAL relations between India and Pakistan cannot be normalised till the Kashmir issue is resolved, said Shehbaz Sharif in his Parliament address after being sworn in as the 23rd prime minister of Pakistan on Monday.

"We can't choose our neighbours, we have to live with them. Nawaz Sharif had extended the hand of friendship with India, but he also spoke of Kashmir. Kashmiris are being killed and till that issue is resolved we can't have normal relations with Bharat," he said.

Asif Ali Zardari (L) greets newly elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif | AP

Hours later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while congratulating Sharif, said: "India desires peace and stability in a region free of terror, so that we can focus on our development challenges and ensure the well-being and prosperity of our people." Sharif's reference to India came towards the end of his address after praising China and other friends of Pakistan.

Exuding confidence of the trust they will continue to have with Beijing, he said, "Our friendship with China is forever, it will never change." He said his government will speed up projects carried out under the $60-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

He also spoke highly of ties with Saudi Arabia, where he said he and his brother Nawaz Sharif felt safe even when they were in exile. Other countries with which Sharif hoped ties would strengthen included Turkey, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Afghanistan, US and EU.

Since he is a part of the coalition that includes Pakistan People's Party, Sharif announced the reintroduction of Benazir Income Support Programme.

Just before voting began, Imran submitted his resignation as PM and his membership of Parliament. Other members of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, too, resigned en masse.

Tourists stray into core area of Bhadra reserve

MARX TEJASWI, BOSKY KHANNA
@ Shivamogga, Bengaluru

FORESTS in Karnataka are under rising threat, not just from poachers and encroachers, but also from unregulated tourism activities. More so from tourists seeking instant social media fame.

In yet another incident, two private jeeps were seen racing through a water body inside Bhadra Tiger Reserve. Forest staffers got into action only when the video surfaced on social media sites on Sunday evening.

Local residents said that the incident in the Hebbe Range of Bhadra reserve occurred over a week ago. But foresters filed a complaint of trespassing under the Wildlife Protection Act on Monday morning.

Conservationists and ground-level forest staffers told The New Indian Express, "The jeeps have gone into the core area of the forest which is prohibited for all. They have strayed nearly 20-25 km from the area restricted to tourists." P5

STILL OUTSIDERS...

Transgenders face discrimination in MNREGA jobs

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

"AT panchayat offices, men are given respect and so are women. But when we transgenders go seeking jobs under MNREGA, we are insulted and made to stand outside. We have to make many visits to get our payments and most of the time, that is also not in full," said Chandini, a transgender from Hoovinahadagali in Vijayanagar district, narrating her story.

The Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department has given jobs to 40 transgenders under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) scheme in different parts of the state. They are part of the labour force that is involved in the construction of roads, building walls at government schools, digging pits for saplings, removing silt from lakes and more.

Though the government aims to give equal opportunities to transgenders, the reality on the ground is different, as this community that has been left on the fringes is facing several issues. Chandini said she has worked under MNREGA programmes. "We are made to work six days a week from 6 am to noon. Though the government-stipulated wage is Rs 289 per day, we are given only Rs 600 to Rs 750 for an entire week of work. When we approach Panchayat Development Officers or panchayat members, they scold us. The amount is so meagre that I am forced to beg most of the time," she said.

Transgenders also get an honorarium of Rs 600 per month, but that too does not come easy as they have to keep making visits to government offices before the payment is made, she said. P5

> Though the government-stipulated wage is ₹289 per day, we are given only ₹600 to ₹750 for an entire week of work. When we approach Panchayat Development Officers or panchayat members, they scold us — Chandini, transgender from Hoovinahadagali in Vijayanagar